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# **Everyday legitimacy in post-conflict spaces: The creation of social legitimacy in Bosnia-Herzegovina's cultural arenas<sup>1</sup>**

Stefanie Kappler

## **Abstract:**

*The international community has long been criticized for its lack of social legitimacy in BiH and thus for its failure to create a sustainable social contract in which people can identify with the version of peace that is being implemented in the country. This is, to a large extent, due to the dysfunctionality of the public space in the light of people's everyday experiences of peace.*

*Although it has often been argued that there is hardly any legitimacy at all in post-war BiH, this paper claims that legitimacy has been moved from the public space to semi-public spaces, arenas where the public and the private are interrelated. One example of locations of displaced legitimacy are local cultural arenas, where hopes emerging in people's everyday life are projected onto alternative visions of peace and a corresponding social contract. In that sense, cultural agencies have served as alternative social locations of legitimacy - as opposed to the lack of formal political legitimacy - due to their closer connection to people's lives and needs.*

## **Introduction**

A poll conducted in Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH) in August 2010 presented the following results:

"An overwhelming majority feel that BiH is moving in the wrong direction. Almost nine-in-ten citizens (87%) say that things in BiH are moving in the wrong direction, a slightly higher percentage than observed in earlier waves of research conducted in October 2009 and April 2010."

(...)

"Only one citizen in 10 (12%) report that their lives have improved over the last 4 years. More than one half of citizens (54%) think that their lives have deteriorated; one-third say that their lives have not changed (34%)."

(National Democratic Institute, 2010: 5)

Although stating a tendency of improvement, the United Nations Development Program's Early Warning System 2010 Report confirms the overall dissatisfaction of the majority of Bosnians (51.8%) with BiH's current political situation (United Nations Development Program, 2010: 82).

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<sup>1</sup> Many thanks to Oliver Richmond as well as two anonymous reviewers for their very constructive comments on this paper.

These polls, although certainly not free from bias, reflect the extent to which people are unhappy with the current situation in BiH as well as with the political directions in which the country is moving. As I show in this paper, this perception is to a high degree due to people's dissatisfaction with the formal political life and an associated lack of legitimacy in the political realm. At the same time, this is related to cynicism about the work of actors like the European Union (EU) or the Office of the High Representative (OHR), which have long been involved in the country, yet without much visible progress in terms of improving people's lives. In fact, as I investigate in this paper, the public sphere has mainly empowered political and economic elites through a system created by the Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA) and maintained by the international community. Although the latter, and mainly the EU, are starting to rethink the political arrangements created by the DPA in terms of aiming to centralize the fragmented state structures,<sup>2</sup> this has faced resistance on the level of political elites, mainly from Republika Srpska (RS). This paper builds on the example of the cultural arena to show how legitimacy has been re-configured in cultural spaces, including a private dimension of peace, representing microcosms of legitimacy and producing social contracts that are responsive to people's everyday experiences. Schwarz (2005: 441) reminds us that a social contract would need to (re-)establish a state-society relationship in terms of addressing questions of rights and representation. Based on this, the paper suggests that a social contract would have to root these questions in people's everyday experiences of peace in order to make the latter sustainable and legitimate. Previous research has raised the question of legitimacy and authority in different spheres. Belloni (2001) and Fagan (2005) have outlined this problematique with respect to civil society actors, while Fox (1999) has investigated religious legitimacy and its impacts on politics more generally. Against this background, this paper focuses on the cultural arena as a sphere in which alternative structures of legitimacy are emerging. This is not to argue that the cultural sphere is representative of society nor that it is superior to the spaces of civil society or religious actors. It is further important to emphasise that the paper does not aim to romanticize cultural activity in BiH, accounting for the fact that numerous cultural activities may appear dubious in their politicization. Yet, instead of assessing the normative value of cultural activity *per se*, the paper aims to conceptualise its power to re-establish structures of legitimacy, albeit on a small scale. Although large sections of the population may not be active in those spheres, the latter are still illustrative of how small spaces can become powerful in terms of serving as microcosms of legitimization.

The research conducted for this paper is based on two stays in BiH of a total of approximately three months, mainly based in Sarajevo, with shorter stays in Banja Luka, Mostar, Srebrenica, Travnik, Pale, Zenica, Pale and Tuzla. During these trips, the author was confronted with two controversial impressions: on the one hand, there are lots of complaints about the lethargy and apathy of people, their reluctance to engage in political and social matters. On the other hand, there is a lot of energy, activism and passion in more hidden spheres, where people volunteer to be able to move and change things for the better. Not only semi-structured interviews, but also an involvement in the

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<sup>2</sup> Xavier Oleiro Ogando, Delegation of the EU to BiH, personal interview, Sarajevo, 08/03/10.

cultural scene in BiH illustrated the dynamics of cultural life. In this paper, those experiences are connected to the problematique of (il)legitimacy in the public sphere as opposed to semi-public arenas, and more specifically, the cultural arena. This aims to point to the processes during the course of which legitimacy disintegrates where it claims to have local currency, yet resting mainly on the international form of legitimacy, but is then reconstructed elsewhere, beyond the public, visible sphere. This points to the multi-dimensionality of legitimacy in terms of the actors and audiences it addresses, and the variety of actors that play a role in its constitution as well as the institutions that those actors create. At the same time, this reflects the disjuncture between state and subject, which often constitutes an issue in post-conflict cases and is a particular problem in BiH, where there is only little accountability and no social contract between the international community, local politicians and the subjects of the peace being created.

### **The creation of a public space by peacebuilding actors in BiH**

‘Public space’ is an abstract notion of space, the idea of a platform of a political community, and is often considered the central sphere in which politics take place. In that sense, the public space of a society determines the extent to which people can participate in political processes, discuss and influence them through their interaction in the public sphere. The social codes and established norms in such a space then determine what is acceptable in that space according to the rules and norms established at a given point of time and context.

What may be of interest in the context of this paper is the double-edged meaning of public space, in its ability to empower and disempower the users of that space, or selected groups of users in that space. This is connected to Arendt’s approach to the public realm, which she considers as an augmentation of human life in terms of its capacity to transcend the limits of what has long been considered as ‘private’ by making interaction with other users of the public realm possible in the first place (Arendt, 1958, 1967; see also Beacroft, 2007). In that sense, the public realm represents a hybrid arena where the private and the political come together, which is at the origin of political action and thus a basic necessity for the functioning of political life in a given context. Yet since this public space does not exist by nature, but is, according to Arendt (1958, 1967) an artificial creation of humans that needs to be constantly re-created to be kept alive, this realm is at the same time vulnerable to being co-opted by political actors, who may try to restrain its functions or, in the most extreme scenario, even abolish it and thus make political life dysfunctional in a society.

Foucault (1980) shares an attitude of ambiguity towards the notion of space more generally, viewing it as a creation from structures of power and domination and thus raising concerns about the problematique of disciplinary power within such spaces on the one hand. On the other hand, in the Foucauldian sense, the presence of power hierarchies in a space implies the possibility of resistance, so, again, applying Foucault’s ideas to the notion of a created public space, the latter can be considered empowering and disempowering at the same time. The concrete ways in which this plays out as well as which actors are

empowered and which are disempowered depend on the context and the concrete power relations within this space.

These dynamics are particularly relevant in an era in which the public/private division has been challenged (see, for instance, Horwitz, 1982 and Boyd, 1997). In this context, Weintraub (1997) points to the differing meanings of 'private' vs. 'public' as well as the arbitrariness of boundary-drawing between the two categories. He suggests that the 'public' has often been viewed as the political and social world, while the 'private' has been understood to mean intimacy and family (Weintraub, 1997: 2). However, when looking at various public spheres, we are not necessarily looking at spheres that are completely detached from people's private identities, but they rather represent spheres in which public and private identities merge and, as one might expect, become part of the political processes of that sphere. In that sense, people's private experiences of public affairs, such as the personal experience of conflict, development or human rights cannot be viewed as isolated from the ways in which they are dealt with publicly. The extent to which the state, for instance, empowers or disempowers certain sections of the population in turn feed into how the state is experienced concretely in people's private lives and what its meanings in that context are. As a result, public space can serve as a space in which private and public identities are channeled into political processes, either to empower the users of the space, or, alternatively, to discipline them and limit their capacities of action when excluding their subjective experiences. The ways in which processes in the private can be translated into the public arena, are dependent on their socio-historical context (Weintraub, 1997: 37), the meaning of the distinction in this context as well as underlying interests and political strategies. The extent to which the private sphere of the users of the space can penetrate the public then determines who is empowered in the space in terms of accounting for the subjectivities in the private sphere.

Against this background, one can ask what kind of political space has been created in the post-war peacebuilding context in Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH). How much of it is connected to the democratic politics, rights, and needs of its citizens, and how much of it is externally driven?

First, I want to suggest that the public sphere in BiH is increasingly becoming a divided space. This may have been the case in the past, but seems to be getting worse in the post-war context, resulting from the two-entity structure as well as from ethnic divisions, with access to rights and benefits being organized along ethnic lines. This is not least due to the constitutional arrangement of the country, which results from the DPA and its associated competitive practices, which ascribe rights in the political sphere and the possibility to participate in governing activities to one's ethnic identity as being either a Bosniak, Serb or Croat.<sup>3</sup> The fact that all "constituent peoples" of BiH were granted a veto right in the DPA, served as an encouragement for people to define their identities primarily as ethnic, before any other kind of identity. Simonsen (2005) outlines how the institutionalization of ethnic identity can then undermine peacebuilding, while "ethno-accentuation" may start to dominate other markers of identification. In BiH, the state-system created a deadlock for a

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.ohr.int/dpa/default.asp?content\\_id=372](http://www.ohr.int/dpa/default.asp?content_id=372) (accessed 01/04/11).

future transformation of an ethnically divided public sphere, in terms of making change dependent on the agreement of all constituent nations of the country, which is a highly unlikely constellation. Interestingly enough, there is now a discourse within the Office of the High Representative (OHR), i.e. the principal organisation supervising the implementation of the DPA and its associated blocking devices, which is asking the 'locals' to develop unblocking mechanisms and change the constant deadlock situation themselves.<sup>4</sup> This seems like a somewhat ironic attitude, given that the OHR is responsible to ensure that the locals comply with the constitution included in the DPA, while the institution now asks for constitutional reform as well as the creation of local unblocking mechanisms despite the structural environment that is hostile to such changes. This represents a new development in the local ownership debate, which had in the past mostly been used as a tool to facilitate and legitimize external intervention. Yet it seems as if the debate is increasingly used to shift responsibility for the failures of intervention as well as the unresolved ethnic question. However, not only can we see ethnic divisions becoming engrained further (cf. Belloni, 2004), but also a deepening of the gap between the two entities of the country.

Second, there is a tendency of the public space, not only in BiH, but of public space in general, to favour the elites of politics and the market. Indeed Horwitz (1982, 1424) reminds us that generally the market serves as a legitimizing institution of the public sphere. Specifically referring to BiH, Pugh (2002) shows how public space has become privatized, mainly by business elites who managed to instrumentalise post-war peacebuilding for their own benefits, drawing on clientelist networks to ensure their access to the "spoils of peace". In BiH, the EU is an interesting example of this, given that it is dependent on working with local political authorities to be able to apply its policies of conditionality as well as the European Partnership agenda. In that sense, the EU is giving additional power to political elites, thus indirectly impacting on the division of the public sphere. Donais (2003: 373) argues that the ambiguous and fragmented governing structures initially promoted by the international community have exacerbated issues of corruption, carving out spaces for local elites to co-opt the state system. This has been particularly evident in the party-ruled hydroelectric facilities in the RS and Western Herzegovina as well as the Elektroprivreda Mostar, the profits of which were eventually channeled into party activities (Donais, 2003: 370). There is in fact a growing acknowledgement within the international community that the policy of propping up the local political elites may cause a number of problems. In that context, it has been suggested that the OHR follows a strategy of "feeding the hand that bites you" by putting money into big projects, which in turn ends up in the pockets of those who create new problems for the country.<sup>5</sup>

Divjak and Pugh (2008) specifically remind us of the problems with criminality and corruption, politically and economically, so the public space is turning into a space of corruption, while the politics of the OHR have developed a rather high degree of tolerance towards issues of corruption. Chandler (2002) has suggested that the policies of the OHR have failed to produce visible results

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<sup>4</sup> Stefan Simosas, OHR, personal interview, Sarajevo, 08/03/11.

<sup>5</sup> Confidential source, personal interview, Banja Luka, 27/04/10.

with respect to corruption, partly as a result of its tendency to circumvent political institutions, treating them as the main problem rather than using them as vehicles for change. The issue of corruption can thus be seen a strong reason for which people have started to withdraw from formal politics and thus stopped being active users of the public sphere. The Balkans report of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2008: 99) indeed suggests that “many in the region feel that only their relatives can be trusted” and thus withdraw from social and economic life. In addition, against the background that the Bosnian people cannot elect the international institutions they are governed by, notably the OHR, Chandler (2006a: 2) suggests that even ten years after Dayton there is still a “lack of political autonomy for Bosnian representatives, and of political accountability for Bosnian citizens”. The reason for this is that the public space has a tendency to exclude the private, which yet forms its very basis of operating. Instead, civil society, institutions, and international law reiterate a public space without accountability and thus further distance the subjects from the space in which they are meant to engage.

Public space has become a space of elites, favouring specific actors: subjects as *the ethnicised, the elites, the rich*, have been empowered by the international peacebuilding community, while actors beyond those categories have been rendered powerless in public space. As a result, public space in post-war BiH has become de-personalised, technicised, shaped by structural constraints and divisions, while leaving little room for change and transgression of boundaries. At the same time, it has drawn a frontier around itself, which aims to exclude the private in order to work the way in which its structures prescribe it.

## **(II)legitimacy in the public sphere**

These tendencies of the public sphere distancing itself from the population raise issues about its social legitimacy in a new way. They stand somewhat in contrast to a common usage of the notion of ‘legitimacy’ in the international realm, which primarily focuses on states as legitimacy audiences (Coleman, 2007: 10; see also Franck, 1990). Therefore, challenging the view of Coleman (2007: 45) which states that “the key criterion of legitimacy is that the intervention should serve the international system”, this paper problematises the dynamics of legitimisation and de-legitimisation of externalised peacebuilding policies - in the broader sense - in the society in which they are deployed, where localised strategies for peace are also in existence in view or hidden from internationals, but cognizant of their standards/ norms. The paper emphasizes the importance of legitimacy from a viewpoint of people’s subjectivities and perceptions, rather than analyzing a more technical dimension of lawful authority, mostly referred to as legality.

Generally, there seems to be an assumption that legitimacy is a feature of the public sphere, i.e. projected in the sphere that is accessible to all citizens and users of the public arena. Boutros-Ghali (1996: para 18, 24), for instance, implies that democracy naturally creates legitimacy, pointing to the link between legitimacy and the political, thus to its location in the public arena of voters and

elections. In that sense, the idea of legitimacy has been linked to a notion of responsibility of the power-holders in front of the subjects of governance (Coicaud, 2010: 18) as well as to its processual nature. In this context, Berman (2010: 136) suggests that legitimacy is in need of continuous recreation, accounting for the constantly newly emerging configurations of a power regime. Responding to these continuously changing configurations is a challenge for the institutions in power, particularly if we assume that legitimacy is a social construction, deriving from the different subjectivities of the subjects in a space. This relates to rights, needs – both material and psychological – as they constitute positions in a space. In this context, Uhlin (2010: 22) reminds us that the creation of legitimacy always implies contested power struggles between highly diverse actors. Indeed, Clark (2005: 254) suggests that legitimacy is a social property rather than the attribute of an action and must thus never be considered in isolation of its audience, where “claims to legitimation are mediated through politics and consensus.” This audience in turn is situated in a political, economic, historical and cultural context, with legitimacy transcending the formal political sphere and extending into people’s private lives and subjectivities.

Against this background, if we are to re-situate legitimacy in the context of the everyday and its critical agencies, we need to take into account the complex negotiation processes about which actors are considered capable of dealing with issues emerging in the daily lives of people, whether those be of social, cultural, political or economic nature. Actors therefore construct legitimacy in the light of their everyday experiences, and the waxing and waning of specific forms of legitimacy in each of the above areas, legitimizing those actors that are capable of connecting to the subjectivities emerging in those experiences. It is therefore important to view the everyday as a space of agency in which subjectivities emerge and are used as tools of transformation, rather than as just containing banal repetitive actions (cf. Richmond, 2011).

In BiH, this situation can be considered particularly eclectic and complex, with a variety of subjectivities coming together in the public sphere. There seems to be only little connection between the political authorities and those complex everyday experiences of people. Sarajlić -Maglić (2010) claims that the power-sharing mechanisms in the political system of BiH have allowed political elites to monopolise the political space for themselves, while at the same time, subordinating the interests of other actors to their own interests in that space. She suggests that the international community has further engrained this system, which has resulted in an “elite-packed democracy” and deprived autonomous actors from accessing the public sphere in favour of the political elites (Sarajlić-Magić, 2010: 55, 56; see also Diamond, 1999). This cannot be seen in isolation of the peacebuilding project in BiH, which has, whilst distorting the power constellations in the public sphere, depoliticized the liberal peace (Divjak and Pugh, 2008: 373) in terms of removing its underlying social contract and transforming it into a technical operation, during the course of which ‘peace’ is measured by benchmarks and standards (cf. Kappler and Richmond, forthcoming 2011). Perhaps surprisingly, there is a clear realization of these problems, particularly within the OHR, which is much less engaged in the country nowadays, while at the same time not feeling it is time to leave before



the respective reforms are implemented locally.<sup>6</sup> In agreement, Chandler (2006a: 2) suggests that even ten years after Dayton, the scene of international actors has restrained the degree of autonomy for Bosnian representatives as well as removed the notion of “political accountability for Bosnian citizens”. This represents a criticism of the practices of the OHR, who is able to intervene in BiH’s domestic policies without being democratically elected by the people. At the same time, this is also to challenge the approach of the EU for having accepted this “highly restricted political sphere” (Chandler, 2006a: 2; see also Björkdahl, Richmond and Kappler, forthcoming). At the same time, the EU had long served as an institution on which hopes for more legitimacy in the internationally created public sphere could emerge, which was, according to Chandler (2006b: 35) mainly the case between 2000 and 2005, a phase of “transition to EU ‘Ownership.’” It was hoped that the EU would be able to find a middle way, still ensuring a controlled transformation of the country and its political affairs, while being perceived as less imposing than the OHR and thus benefiting from a legitimacy bonus. This, however, failed, with the EU’s popularity declining as people realized that the changes promoted by the EU were not significantly improving their lives. This represented yet another factor that considerably reduced people’s trust in the public sphere and led to frustration with the political dynamics taking place in it. There is even an awareness in the international community that the popularity of the EU is in decline – mainly in the Federation – since it is not prepared to intervene as much as the OHR does.<sup>7</sup> The need to intervene in turn is contested among the population itself, with the Bosniaks generally being more positive towards OHR intervention than, for instance, the Bosnian Serbs or Croats (cf. Kostić, 2007).

What we can observe in BiH more generally is a mutual shifting of responsibility for legitimacy deficits between the international community and local political elites. Often, when asking members of the international community in BiH about legitimacy issues in the country, they automatically refer to local conditions, such as issues with politicized media or corrupt politicians.<sup>8</sup> The World Bank, to cite one example, derives the lack of adequate social assistance schemes as well as a bad business environment in the country from the failure of the domestic system and elites to create better models of governance.<sup>9</sup>

In contrast, in the context of the long-lasting and ineffective attempts to form a government after the 2010 general elections, some political actors, mainly on the Bosniak side, and much less in Republika Srpska (RS), have called for the help of mainly the OHR to use his power to act as an arbiter and help implement the election results in the cantons (cf. Kostić, 2007).<sup>10</sup> Equally in the context of constitutional reform, there is hope on the part of political actors – again, certainly much more in the Federation than in RS – that the international

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<sup>6</sup> Mark Wheeler, OHR, personal interview, Sarajevo, 16/03/10.

<sup>7</sup> Confidential source, international community, personal interview, Sarajevo, 03/03/11.

<sup>8</sup> Confidential source, international community, personal interview, Sarajevo, 03/03/11. This mainly came out during five field trips to BiH between 2008 and 2011.

<sup>9</sup> Marco Mantovanelli, World Bank, personal interview, Sarajevo, 07/03/11.

<sup>10</sup> Nermina Zaimović-Uzunović, SDP, personal interview, Sarajevo, 07/03/11. This source can certainly not be read as representative in that the interviewee is a member of a political party that pursues certain goals. Yet it is illustrative of some claims being made from the side of the Federation.

community will intervene to help design the reform process.<sup>11</sup> This reflects the extent to which responsibilities to create a legitimate system of governance are shifted between domestic and international elites, with neither of those actors being perceived as particularly legitimate in terms of their ability to connect to people's everyday experiences. Legitimacy is thus constructed from different perspectives, with different views of it. For instance, from the regional level, the OHR is viewed as the last defense against local atavism, while from the local level, politicians and civil society actors often ruefully accept it may be needed but also argue it undermines their state building process and their rights to autonomy.

But just as much as there is only low trust in politicians at best - mainly among the Bosniaks, there are frequent calls for the international community to engage in politics by sanctioning corrupt politicians<sup>12</sup> - the international community has a reputation of being distant from the everyday, not actually experiencing the day-to-day problems of their country of deployment.<sup>13</sup> This does not only hold true for the bigger governing institutions, but represents also a criticism of international or internationally-directed /-funded NGOs. In order to get access to funding, those have to transform in terms of professionalizing according to the preferences of their donors (Mitchell and Kappler, 2009; Belloni 2001; Fagan 2005), thereby risking losing touch with society. This is an experience shared by numerous organizations that have felt the need to adapt to this system to survive. The founder of a youth centre in Travnik mainly deplored the loss of a 'project 'spirit' when having to turn it into a funding application and transforming the project according to the associated donor requirements.<sup>14</sup> In a similar vein, a staff member of the arts association SCCA in Sarajevo talked about a workshop that they organized in Mostar with an Italian partner, which became "a disaster", because it did not respond to local conditions, but rather reflected "how the international community thinks about us" in terms of adopting a patronizing approach rather than adapting it to local conditions.<sup>15</sup> Some local associations have, to a certain extent, managed to preserve their autonomy - the socio-critical artist association Ambrosia being one example of this - which has however often limited their access to funding and thus restricted the impact of their work.

To conclude, we can clearly observe a disconnect between the public sphere, i.e. the sphere inhabited by the domestic and international elites, and what people perceive as their everyday context. This is because what is perceived as public space has been permeable to the private only to a very limited extent and has thus become an externalized space. The externalized public space that emerges here, in the form of the internationally constructed state, is, in the eyes of local communities, largely an illegitimate space, which empowers a few selected, while the majority feel excluded from participating in it. In that sense, the public realm is empowering the political power-holders,

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<sup>11</sup> Nermina Zaimović-Uzunović, SDP, personal interview, Sarajevo, 07/03/11.

<sup>12</sup> Darko Saračević, Alter Art, personal interview, Travnik, 02/03/11.

<sup>13</sup> Pierre Courtin, Duplex Gallery, personal interview, Sarajevo, 23/04/10.

<sup>14</sup> Darko Saračević, Alter Art, personal interview, Travnik, 02/03/11.

<sup>15</sup> Asja Hafner, SCCA, personal interview, Sarajevo, 16/04/10.

while restraining the possibilities of the subordinates to participate and create legitimacy on their own terms. It seems that, as soon as an actor is empowered, they lose touch with the everyday experience and play the game of the public realm, which is one of illegitimacy from the local perspective rather than connection with their everyday, their needs and agencies. Against this background, we need to ask what has happened to the processes of legitimacy – have they disappeared or rather moved to less public, less visible spaces? And do these versions compete with, block, reject, modify, or hybrise international versions of legitimacy? This is the context in which the following section exemplarily investigates actors in the cultural sphere in BiH, to gauge the extent to which new semi-public arenas are emerging in which social legitimacy is re-created in alternative ways. It will examine how the audiences of the public sphere find a social contract on a micro-level due to the failure of the political sphere to provide such a contract that would be acceptable to all.

### **The hybrid, semi-public arena of the cultural**

This section argues that rather than disappearing completely from society, legitimacy has been equipped with new means of survival. We may not find it in to a large extent in the public sphere, yet we can observe that it has been moved to what I call ‘semi-public’ spheres or arenas, where it has been revived and modified to make sense locally. In these spheres, we find a mutual penetration of the public and the private or the everyday, where the latter makes sense in the former and vice versa.

This runs counter the argument of Sarajlić-Magić (2010: 57), who claims that “frustrations with political system are not channeled into public action but into public apathy and resignation,” pointing to a very common discourse in BiH, which accuses particularly young people of not engaging with the public sphere. Much in contrast, this paper suggests that there may be apathy in the public sphere, yet this only represents the surface of society, while we find manifestations of agency and legitimacy in semi-public spheres which connect much closer to the lives of people and thus resist the legitimacy deficits in the public arena. This is in line with Buden’s argument, which situates the transformation of public space in a framework of cultural subversion, claiming that social change must be viewed as a transgressive (rather than dialectical) practice (Buden, 2003). In that context, Buden (2003) claims that “[p]ublic space (...) is not the site of political change as it once – in a very profound way –used to be.” Having this in mind, I suggest that the locus of everyday politics as well as everyday legitimacy has partly moved away from the externalized public sphere, towards new arenas of contestation, conflict, and negotiation, which form the very basis of alternative legitimacy structures in a local context through their ability to absorb the private. In this context, Cornwall (2004: 76) speaks of ‘invited spaces’, which bring together heterogeneous actors shaped by differences in status, “who might relate very differently if they met in other settings”. Cultural spaces in BiH can be considered ‘invited spaces’ according to this definition. Indeed, what we can see with a lot of cultural institutions,

whether those are formal or informal, is that they create spaces in which people can gather, which would not necessarily be possible in the public sphere, which is shaped by the power of the strongest, as well as ethnic divisions. However, a focus on theatres, concerts, galleries, choirs, and so forth reflects the extent to which the users of such spaces can relate in alternative ways beyond the context of the public sphere. In that sense, 'invited spaces' change the dynamics of social relationships. Their accessibility may be limited in terms of only addressing an interested (mainly critical and alternative) mass, but at the same time, they create a feeling of ownership, of 'being welcome' for their ('invited') members. Against this background, legitimacy has moved to semi-public arenas, constituting themselves as invited spaces, which have managed to develop structures connecting to people's everyday lives.

Indeed, cultural actors such as theatres closely deal with issues connected to social life in BiH. A dramaturgist of the Youth Theatre in Sarajevo, for instance, emphasized that one of the first questions when thinking about a future performance is always to what extent it will connect to people and their social experiences.<sup>16</sup> Numerous theatre directors, producers, and dramaturgists interviewed in different parts of the country confirmed that their performances tend follow social issues as they are at stake in a given social situation. A programme director of the theatre festival MESS explained the necessity of connecting with 'our society' in terms of talking about topical social problems, such as pedophilia.<sup>17</sup> To be able to communicate such ideas, they often use metaphors of the family as a symbol of society,<sup>18</sup> a clear integration of the private and everyday. Again, this increases the feeling of belonging to and ownership of a space by both the creators as well as the audience of that space. This reflects the extent to which the cultural sphere has the ability to make processes, which appear distant and meaningless in the public sphere, touchable in private spheres in terms of connecting them to people's lives. In that sense, the public and the private become closely intertwined, and cultural actors often link the meaning of politics in the public sphere to their meanings for people's identities.<sup>19</sup> The Center for Interdisciplinary Research of Visual Culture, for instance, has labeled politically sensitive and contested buildings, such as the highly securitized new American embassy in Sarajevo, to show their resistance to what they call 'visual pollution' of BiH's cultural landscape and its implications on people's everyday experiences.<sup>20</sup> This represents a way of emotionalizing and personalizing the political, which then makes it easier to connect to people who feel there is a relation between the political and their own lives. As a result, legitimacy can be re-situated in a personalized sphere, with cultural arenas serving as tools by which this re-situation can be realized. The connection between the political and the personal is particularly evident with the case of the

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<sup>16</sup> Aida Pilav, Pozoriste Mladih Sarajevo, personal interview, Sarajevo, 31/03/10.

<sup>17</sup> Selma Spahić, MESS Sarajevo and National Theatre Zenica, personal interview, Sarajevo, 03/03/11.

<sup>18</sup> Selma Spahić, MESS Sarajevo and National Theatre Zenica, personal interview, Sarajevo, 03/03/11.

<sup>19</sup> Aida Bucalović, Center for Interdisciplinary Research of Visual Culture, personal interview, Sarajevo, 21/04/10.

<sup>20</sup> Aida Bucalović, Center for Interdisciplinary Research of Visual Culture, personal interview, Sarajevo, 21/04/10.

multi-religious choir Pontanima, based in Sarajevo. Despite the religious and ethnic cleavages in the country, this choir represents a space in which people from diverse backgrounds can come together, which, following Cornwall's argument, would not be possible in the public sphere due to their different backgrounds. However, in the arena of the choir, otherwise conflicting social relations can be re-configured and personalized. The identities that are relevant in the public sphere (i.e. mainly ethnic ones) do not matter in the sphere of the choir, where it is all about personal relations.<sup>21</sup> A film producer who made a documentary about Pontanima derives the cohesion of the choir from the intense feelings it involves: its traumatic element, and at the same time its members' motivation and passion for the common project.<sup>22</sup> The choir, comprising about 20-40 active members, is indeed rather famous across the country. Numerous people have pointed out to me that they were deeply touched, not only by the music, but also by the courage of the members to perform cross-religious music. The reconciliation of Muslim, Christian, Jewish and other cultural markers is not common in the public sphere, but becomes a possibility in the choir's concert and rehearsal venues.

Not only do many of the semi-public cultural arenas personalize social and political relations, but, due to the negative perceptions of the political sphere and the associated lack of legitimacy, many cultural agencies place emphasis on not being perceived as political. The Center for Culture in Travnik, although mainly being funded by the municipality and thus necessarily having to cooperate with local authorities, emphasizes that they are not involved in any kind of political work, that they are not interested in nationalist ideologies, but much rather in working professionally on their projects.<sup>23</sup> Along similar lines, the founder of the youth centre Alter Art emphasizes that the centre does not follow any nationalistic ideology, but is more interested in educating young people for free thinking.<sup>24</sup> Even a student radio station in Sarajevo emphasized their deviation from the common political practices in the country, in which media and politicians work hand in hand, while the student radio is trying to work differently, more independently and responding to the needs of their audience, i.e. the students.<sup>25</sup>

However, the statement of many cultural actors claiming that they are not engaging in the political sphere does not mean that they are not political. To the contrary, such actors create a critical (i.e. political) mass and thus use their transformative potential in their semi-public arenas to impact on structures of legitimacy, i.e. the way in which people perceive legitimate order as well as what kind of social contract they envisage, by evoking a critical consciousness. This is made possible by the fact that such organizations penetrate both the public and the private, and can therefore act as translators between them, hybridizing those spheres according to the needs of their audiences. It can actually not be argued that the cultural scene is free of politics in a broad understanding. It has been suggested that BiH's political situation is clearly reflected in the cultural sector –

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<sup>21</sup> The author visited the choir rehearsals during a couple of months in spring 2010.

<sup>22</sup> Namik Kabil, film producer, personal interview, Sarajevo, 14/04/10.

<sup>23</sup> Vildana Kalčo, Center za Kulturu, personal interview, Travnik, 02/03/11.

<sup>24</sup> Darko Saračević, Alter Art, personal interview, Travnik, 02/03/11.

<sup>25</sup> Mirza Ajnadžić, EFM student radio, personal interview, Sarajevo, 07/03/11.

an indicator of which being the fact that the war did not only constitute a dramatic rupture in the country's political system, but at the same time also in its cultural life.<sup>26</sup> The president of the arts association Protok in Banja Luka suggested that their work is complementary and alternative to existing institutions, while the practice of their arts and artists refers critically to society and socio-political processes.<sup>27</sup> We can therefore observe that semi-public spheres are creating a kind of 'parallel world' to the public sphere, a world in which politics are made accessible to the users of this space, who then, rather than withdrawing from such processes, find different ways of engaging with them. It is then in such spaces that disrupted social relations can be restored and implicit change becomes thinkable. In this context, the youth theatre in Sarajevo aims to change and educate people, yet at the same time emphasizing that this is very different from political processes in the public sphere, which "does not give us enough, it does not give us enough space for thinking individually."<sup>28</sup> Indeed, it is quite obvious that theatres have developed their own means of changing society. The theatre festival MESS, for instance, once featured a performance written by Oliver Frlić, a rather dark and violent story about the breakup of Yugoslavia. This was so intense that some people left or even attacked the actors in the play, yet many others emphasized that the play really represented the anger they felt themselves and thus had a huge impact on them.<sup>29</sup> This reflects the impact the cultural arena can have on people in terms of establishing close connections with them, making them part of that sphere and including them with the processes that happen there. In this vein, cultural arenas are not only parallel worlds to the public sphere, but they also act as connectors between spheres. Centres such as the cultural youth centre OKC Abrašević in Mostar or the youth centre in Srebrenica regularly organize public festivals during the course of which they connect their agendas to issues concerning the wider community. The "Art in Divided Cities" festival in Mostar addressed the local community in terms of touching upon topics of everyday relevance in Mostar. This concerned the use of public space, its infrastructures, actors and so forth. Similarly, the Sarajevo Film Festival, the Sarajevo Winter Festival and the Mediterranean Film Festival in Široki Brijeg represent spaces in which public and private experiences can be reconfigured, at the same time addressing a wide audience. Indeed, the website of the Široki Brijeg festival claims that "[w]ithin the last ten years we have succeeded to create an atmosphere in which no one feels alienated, inferior or less invited to be a part of the event."<sup>30</sup>

At the same time, the semi-public spaces that numerous cultural actors create work differently from the public space that political actors operate in. In this context, the director of the youth centre in Srebrenica suggested: "I am not a politician, we have a different way of changing."<sup>31</sup> Their way of changing consists of providing a space for young people where they can be creative and communicate their needs. In that sense, the tools of connecting to the users and

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<sup>26</sup> Vildana Kalčo, Center za Kulturu, personal interview, Travnik, 02/03/11.

<sup>27</sup> Radenko Milak, Protok, email conversation, 04/06/10.

<sup>28</sup> Aida Pilav, Pozoriste Mladih Sarajevo, personal interview, Sarajevo, 31/03/10.

<sup>29</sup> Selma Spahić, MESS Sarajevo and National Theatre Zenica, personal interview, Sarajevo, 03/03/11.

<sup>30</sup> [http://www.mff.ba/mff\\_x\\_ofestivalu.asp](http://www.mff.ba/mff_x_ofestivalu.asp) (accessed 18/09/11).

<sup>31</sup> Milena Nikolić, Youth Centre Srebrenica, personal interview, Srebrenica, 02/04/10.

creators (often people are in both roles) of the cultural arena differ radically from what would be acceptable in the public sphere. As the PR manager of the Museum for Contemporary Arts in Banja Luka pointed out, their work in the contemporary scene is very political, social as well as provocative. She quoted the example of a Serbian artist hosted by the museum who used real animal organs to create a cross – this was to shock and provoke people, but at the same time to force them to make a personal judgement about controversial topics, which tend to be avoided in public discourses.<sup>32</sup>

It becomes clear that, despite some overlaps, the audiences of the public and the cultural arena differ significantly from one another. This is related to the quality of the cultural scene as an ‘invited space’, a sphere in which ownership is created, which is accessible to a very different audience. The Museum for Contemporary Arts in Banja Luka, for instance, places emphasis on attracting all kinds of people, not just the social, cultural or political elites, claiming that “the museum should be a place for everyone”.<sup>33</sup> In contrast to that, the arts association SCCA quite specifically speaks to a marginalized group of people, aiming to advocate for social minorities and their needs.<sup>34</sup> This is clearly linked to the idea of being able to change society with the help of arts and culture, since it is assumed that social problems are reflected in arts as well.<sup>35</sup> Aiming to provide a space for minorities and the marginalized of society, the youth centre OKC Abrašević in Mostar provides an alternative space in which people from the margins of society can come together without prejudices and participate in discourses, which is often denied in the public sphere.<sup>36</sup> This holds equally true for the arts centre Alter Art, which aims to create a creative space for young people, where they can express their opinions without restrictions,<sup>37</sup> which, again, would be subject to social censorship in the public space. Given that neither Travnik nor Mostar have a cinema, the cultural spaces of those towns serve as a rather popular venue, especially for young people.

The approach of numerous cultural spaces to connect to all kinds of people means that people’s engagement and motivation in this arena are much higher than in the public sphere, which tends to be shaped by frustration and resignation. It has indeed been suggested that people in Travnik are very involved in cultural activities, linked to a feeling of “naš grad, naš rad, naša kultura” (translated: our city, our work, our culture).<sup>38</sup> This feeling of ownership is due to the proximity of the cultural arena to people’s lives, the comparatively and legitimacy is linked to feelings of trust and participation as well as the connection to the everyday, which makes the users of that space believe that there is a potential in arts to bring about social and political change, even though this may be on a very subtle level. Engagement in educational terms, mainly through theatres and films, is part of this change, just as much as the development of platforms on which the meanings of peace and social life can be

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<sup>32</sup> Branka Šestić, Muzej DSavremene Umjetnosti RS, personal interview, Banja Luka, 27/04/10.

<sup>33</sup> Branka Šestić, Muzej Savremene Umjetnosti RS, personal interview, Banja Luka, 27/04/10.

<sup>34</sup> Asja Hafner, scca/pro.ba, personal interview, Sarajevo, 16/04/10.

<sup>35</sup> Asja Hafner, scca/pro.ba, personal interview, Sarajevo, 16/04/10.

<sup>36</sup> Katie Hampton, OKC Abrašević, personal interview, Mostar, 18/03/10.

<sup>37</sup> Darko Saračević, Alter Art, personal interview, Travnik, 02/03/11.

<sup>38</sup> Vildana Kalčo, Center za Kulturu, personal interview, Travnik, 02/03/11.

discussed. The author has, for instance, witnessed a book presentation held during the Sarajevo Winter Festival in which the audience (about 60 people cramped into a tiny room) was emotionally touched in a way that they connected the political and social messages of the book to their lives as well as discovering commonalities between their lives which they may not have expected before. Therefore, we can observe that the audience of the semi-public cultural sphere is very different from that of the ethnicised, non-private, competitive public space, including the *non-professionalised, the everyday woman and man, the marginalized and the contextualized self*.

The fact that the cultural arena gives space to the contextualized subject explains why this space is not homogeneous, but contested and fragmented through the encounter of a variety of subjectivities. It can be argued that this sphere is a highly fluid and flexible one, changing with the users involved in the space, which in turn points to its quality as a receiving platform.. It can indeed be said that cultural activities help create open spaces of interaction between people. For instance, Pravo Ljudski, a human rights film festival, aims to create an open space for people, in which they get access to information and can move on a platform of discussion.<sup>39</sup> This is based on the assumption that in order to create peace, people need a common space where they can discuss and agree on the foundations of their social life.<sup>40</sup> In that sense, the arenas of culture serve as little microcosms in which different versions of peace can be negotiated, tested, developed and modified. At the same time, the ownership of such processes rests with the users of that space, i.e. the subject in its everyday, subjective context. We can therefore claim that legitimacy translates itself as ownership and vice versa, with the cultural arena providing platforms of discourse on which legitimacy, authority as well as associated rules and norms can be constantly renegotiated in subtle ways. In practice, this has concrete implications on the work of a number of grassroots organizations. The music rehearsal rooms in the youth centre Alter Art, for instance, were completely refurbished by the youth from the community, which created a strong feeling of ownership of that space and is still keeping them together as a community.<sup>41</sup> Very similarly, the cultural youth centres in Srebrenica and in Mostar were (re-)built by their current users, who still feel that the respective centre is their second home, in which they can express themselves freely and discuss any topic connected to social life. The OKC Abrašević in Mostar organized a festival on “Defense of Public Space, Defense of our Future”. Not only did this festival promote diverse cultural events, but it also provided a space in which people could sit together informally and discuss problems with the current post-war situation as well as potential options for the future of the city and their lives.<sup>42</sup> The same is true for the Duplex Gallery in Sarajevo, where the owner has created a small exhibition space for local artists. This space seems symbolically outside the public sphere – it is very hidden and hard to find – but at the same time this has developed into a vibrant arena for those who know about it. It happens a lot that artists randomly assemble in the

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<sup>39</sup> Kumjana Novakova, Pravo Ljudski, personal interview, Sarajevo, 09/04/10.

<sup>40</sup> Kumjana Novakova, Pravo Ljudski, personal interview, Sarajevo, 09/04/10.

<sup>41</sup> Darko Saračević, Alter Art, personal interview, Travnik, 02/03/11.

<sup>42</sup> The author attended parts of the festival at OKC Abrašević, “Defense of Public Space, Defense of our Future”, Mostar, 15/04/10.



backyard of the gallery to discuss about social issues, about problems in the everyday lives as well as the political realities in BiH.<sup>43</sup>

These dynamics reflect the shifting of legitimacy structures into the semi-public sphere, where a variety of actors create connections to people and their private everyday contexts. If we remind ourselves of the notion of legitimacy as a social construction, it becomes clear that there are a number of competing legitimacies at play in the cultural arena. Indeed, legitimacy in terms of who is trusted to be a legitimate promoter of social change, is constantly renegotiated by a variety of actors, but those debates are given a platform in the cultural arena. The latter represents a sphere in which actors can configure differently from the ways in which this would be possible in the public sphere. In that sense, the local scene serves as an interesting example of how, when disintegrating in the public sphere, legitimacy can be re-configured in alternative circles to re-establish the connection between governing structures and people's everyday lives. This suggests that the internationally imposed and political elite-implemented peace is problematic as a result of its inability to account for the private and the failure to translate this into the public sphere. As a result, legitimacy in the cultural arena emerges from its ability to hybridise public and private concerns, which connect people's experiences to political action and thus create a feeling of ownership.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has pointed to the legitimacy deficits in the public sphere in BiH, resulting from the distance between the governing political elites and international community on the one hand, and the population on the other hand. This has been linked to the creation of a distance between the public and the private, while the everyday has been limited in its ability to penetrate an externalized public sphere. The paper has then illustrated how this has led to a shifting of legitimacy to semi-public spheres, the cultural arena being one example of this, in which structures of legitimacy are reconstituted in alternative, more fragmented ways. The cultural arena has been able to gain more legitimacy through its capacity to hybridise the public and the private. It needs to be said that this does neither mean that the cultural sphere enjoys legitimacy from the perspective of all sectors of society – indeed its impact may be considered as a limited one – nor that it is the only alternative sphere that enjoys legitimacy. However, the cultural arena shows us that legitimacy does not merely disappear, but that it moves to other spheres and platforms. Cultural arenas can thus be considered microcosms of legitimacy for the users of these arenas, creating alternative structures of identification and social configuration as they might not be thinkable in the public sphere. This involves, for instance, common cross-ethnic or interreligious projects as well as the presentation of artwork in provocative ways.

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<sup>43</sup> The author has been present at such occasions. Also: Pierre Courtin, Duplex Gallery, personal interview, Sarajevo, 23/04/10.

At the same time, it is important to be aware of the fact, that although semi-public spaces differ from the public space, they are not completely isolated from them. Instead, cultural spaces are certainly regulated, restrained and controlled by the public sphere – one must not forget that the majority of cultural activities in BiH are sponsored by the state or municipality and are therefore accountable to public authorities to a certain extent. Yet, in a sense, semi-public spaces are also enabled by the deficits of the public space, through their ability to ways of modifying existing or external concepts of legitimacy through their connection to the everyday. These dynamics are particularly interesting in the peacebuilding context, since they show us that local actors have subtly managed what international actors have been struggling with for a long time: the reconstruction of legitimacy in a war-torn country. Certainly, these alternative legitimacy structures might not necessarily please the political elites and the international community, who would much rather see legitimacy emerge in the public sphere of the state – which would most likely also be a desirable goal for most of the population. Yet, due to a failure to achieve this, new actors have been empowered and taken over functions of the public spheres on their own terms. Against the background of a lack of a broad social contract between national and international elites and the population, small and informal social contracts have been established in the cultural sphere, in which people's everyday needs are addressed and given a voice. The resulting processes of peace and legitimacy have thus been fragmented and moved to the margins of society, which is problematic due to a lack of a central platform of debate. However, this has resulted in a chance for marginalized actors to get included in smaller arenas, where they can contribute to a newly emerging social contract with their own experiences and needs.

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